

Preface

Throughout the 1980s, a growing body of evidence indicated that higher levels of vegetable and fruit consumption were associated with reducing the risk of many cancers. Responding to this evidence and a mandate to diffuse and disseminate research results to improve the health of the population, the National Cancer Institute (NCI) of the National Institutes of Health initiated the development of the national 5 A Day for Better Health Program.

Then, in the 1990s, evidence for an association between increased vegetable and fruit consumption and a reduced risk of cancer and other diseases increased in strength and in complexity. Global experts reviewed the world literature on the relationship between diet and cancer, using a consistent method of assessing the scientific evidence, and produced an extensive report. They estimated that “a simple change, such as eating the recommended five servings of fruits and vegetables each day, could by itself reduce cancer rates more than 20 percent.” (WCRF/AICR 1997, p. 540).

The national 5 A Day for Better Health Program is a large-scale, public/private partnership between the Produce for Better Health Foundation, representing the vegetable and fruit industry, and NCI. The goal of the Program is to increase the average consumption of vegetables and fruit in the United States to five or more servings every day, in order to reduce the incidence of cancer and other chronic diseases.

Several noteworthy milestones contributed to the production of this monograph. At the release of this publication, the 5 A Day Program will have accumulated 10 years of experience in the use of media, social marketing, community-based interventions, coalition-building, and the provision of programmatic support to 54 state and territorial coordinators, in addition to sponsored research and evaluation. In 2000, the NCI initiated an evaluation of the success of the Program's first 10 years. A national panel of experts evaluated the

Program's performance and produced a report (“5 A Day for Better Health Program Evaluation Report” discussed in Chapter 13) that affirmed the Program's value and provided recommendations for its expansion and improvement. NCI also commissioned, with the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, an authoritative, systematic review of evidence regarding the efficacy of behavioral interventions for dietary change to increase vegetable and fruit consumption and reduce fat consumption. This report recognizes that carefully designed and targeted interventions, including many of the interventions based upon the 5 A Day message, can achieve important changes in dietary behavior. A summary of this report is available online at www.abrq.gov/clinic/dietsumm.htm, and access to an executive summary of the 5 A day for Better Health Evaluation Report is available at www.cancercontrol.cancer.gov/5ad_exec.html. Finally, over the past few years, promising international efforts to promote vegetable and fruit consumption, based on the 5 A Day model, have been developed in several nations (see Chapter 12).

The purpose of this monograph is to provide a detailed description of the national 5 A Day Program, so that this model of a public/private partnership can be used by others, including other food sectors, public health programs at the State and local levels, policymakers, nutrition professionals, programs for the prevention of chronic diseases, and behavioral and other research scientists, as well as governmental agencies and food industries in other nations.

The first few chapters of the monograph describe the Program's origins via a capacity-building grant to the California Department of Health Services, the steps taken to develop the national program, and the supporting legal and policy documents. The next few chapters provide details about program components, such as the industry, media, and community-based programs.

The following chapters describe the process and outcomes research that support the program's effectiveness in increasing consumption of vegetables and fruit in a variety of populations. To conclude, some of the international efforts to develop similar programs are described, along with a summary of the program's national evaluation and future vision.

The national 5 A Day Program is now entering a new phase during which NCI hopes to expand and strengthen the partnerships both within and outside of government, simultaneously enhancing the programmatic and research components of the Program. Key challenges for the future include how best to fund State health department programs, how to incorporate the model into broader chronic disease prevention programs (such as cardiovascular, diabetes, physical activity and diet); how to increase the use of evidence-based communications and other programmatic activities, and how to build collaborations between the industry and behavioral researchers.

NCI is proud of this unique public-private partnership and welcomes involvement and advice from interested parties. We hope that this monograph will be useful to all of those dedicated to improving the health of their Nation's citizens.

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